

Preserve guards Tejon wonders

Unique acreage set aside

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TEJON RANCH – Tejon Ranch has ever been a point of convergence, a place where the desert climes of the Mojave bump up against the rolling fertility of the Sierras and the humid coast. Somehow the three achieve balance.

With the creation of the 100,000-acre Tejon Ranch Preserve, the human interests in the area hope to emulate that natural harmony.

Conservation agencies joined the Tejon Ranch Company on Tuesday to announce the boundaries of the preserve after two years of scientific study. Along with the Trust for Public Land, its conservation partner, the company hailed the preserve as a triumph of balanced land use.

"It has been a lengthy but a thoughtful process," Tejon Ranch CEO Bob Stine said. "The goal was to develop a long-term, sustainable ... land plan" both economically and



WILDERNESS WONDERS – Colorful wildflowers adorn a ridge at Tejon Ranch. The Tejon Ranch Preserve, whose boundaries would shield 100,000 acres of naturally and culturally diverse landscape, was unveiled Tuesday after two years of scientific study.

ecologically.

The Tejon Ranch Company owns 270,000 acres of contiguous land stretching from northeast Los Angeles County into Kern County. The company uses the land for farming, cattle grazing, oil production and mining as well as hunting and other recreational activities. Its plan is to continue those operations along with "limited development of about 5% of the ranch over the next 25 years," Stine said.

But the ranch is also home to some ecological wonders.

"We felt that we had ... spectacular natural

resources here," Stine said of the decision to create the preserve from ranch land. "The Tejon Ranch Preserve is a central part of our overall vision for the future of Tejon Ranch."

"Any conservation biologist would come out here and just be in awe," said Dr. Michael Josselyn of the environmental advisory company WRA, Inc.

Josselyn headed the two-year analysis process that determined which portion of Tejon Ranch would make up the preserve.

"It is one of the most diverse areas in California," he said, because it lies at the

junction of the Sierra Nevada, the desert and the coast. "They all come together at Tejon," he said.

WRA took 15 years of collected data about the ranch and compiled it into a Geographic Information System, Josselyn said. His team then spent some time in the field verifying the data with the help of the GIS and a global positioning system.

"We were looking for that wilderness experience. It's hard to find in California," Josselyn said.

Finally, WRA analyzed their findings to choose what they consider to be the



LORD OF THE SKIES – A majestic condor is silhouetted against the sky over Tejon Ranch. The Tejon Ranch Preserve hopes to shield tens of thousands of diverse animal and plant species for posterity. An environmentalist termed Tejon Ranch's holdings a wilderness experience "hard to find in California."

100,000 most important acres for preservation. That area is home to tens of thousands of plant and animal species, he said, including the San Joaquin kit fox, the blunt-nosed leopard lizard, the Tehachapi salamander, the California condor and the Bakersfield cactus.

Most of those "very unique species" are concentrated in "Comanche Point," an annexed area to the north of the main "Highlands Core" of the preserve.

The core section of the preserve offers a glimpse of California's past, both cultural and natural. Its

historic assets include Native American burial grounds and a military cemetery as well as what Reed Holderman of the Trust for Public Land described as "the largest unspoiled oak woodland in the state."

"This is probably the way California looked 500 years ago," he said. "There's not many places like this ... this could be the place that people in the Antelope Valley 20 years from now will call their sanctuary."

The third and final section of the Tejon Ranch Preserve is a 35-mile-long corridor designated to the Pacific Crest Trail. The PCT stretches along 2,650 miles

between the Mexican border and Canada. Its current route takes hikers across a broad swath of Mojave Desert.

The realignment will route the trail up onto the Tejon Ranch ridges, where it was originally intended to be, said Liz Bergeron, executive director of the Pacific Coast Trail Association.

Since 1968, when the trail was designated a National Scenic Trail, the National Forest service has been working to establish the trail via land purchases. The trail was "completed" in 1993, but with some divergence from the original ideal.

"We recognize it as a long-

term project," Bergeron said. "This is going to be one of the major realignments ... a huge, huge improvement."

It "will allow the public to walk in and see the best of the best," Holderman said. "This has been the No.1 area that the forest service has wanted to realign."

The choices of Tejon Ranch Company, and even the creation of the preserve, have not proceeded without some opposition from local environmental activists and no-growth advocates, but so far the process has been fairly smooth, ranch officials said